

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 422

CS 211 927

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TITLE The Press and Black Elected Officials at Three Levels of Public Office.  
PUB DATE Aug 89  
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (72nd, Washington, DC, August 10-13, 1989).  
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Black Community; \*Blacks; Journalism; Mail Surveys; \*Mass Media Role; Media Research; National Surveys; \*News Media; News Reporting; \*Public Officials; Public Opinion; Questionnaires; Racial Relations  
IDENTIFIERS Journalism Research; \*Media Coverage; Media Government Relationship; News Topics; \*Press Responsibility

## ABSTRACT

To examine three aspects of the relationship of Black leadership and White press--Black elected officials' (BEOs) views on press coverage of the Black community and on their own dealings with or treatment by the press, and their use of the news media for job-related needs--a study surveyed Blacks from three levels of elective office, school board representatives, mayors, and state legislators. Subjects, 113 Black state legislators, 80 Black mayors, and 359 Black school board members, responded to questionnaires by mail that measured respondent views on performance of "the major White-owned newspaper" in the community. The sample represented a low response rate in relation to the number of questionnaires sent out. Findings indicated that (1) BEOs "have no use" for the White press; and (2) they find press coverage of the Black community to be insensitive, incomplete, and inappropriate. (Forty-two notes and five tables of data are included.) (MS)

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ED309422

MINORITIES & COMMUNICATION

The Press and Black Elected Officials  
at Three Levels of Public Office

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Presented to the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, D.C., August 1989. Funding for this research was provided by San Diego State University and The University of Alabama.

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## The Press and Black Elected Officials at Three Levels of Public Office

This paper examines three aspects of the relationship of black leadership and white press: black elected officials' (BEOs') views on press coverage of the black community and on their own dealings with or treatment by the press, and their use of the news media for job-related needs.

In order to include varying degrees of press contact and orientation toward public office and the press, we surveyed, by mail, blacks from three levels of elective office, including samples from: the more than 1,300 black school board representatives; the more than 250 black mayors; and the more than 300 black state legislators.<sup>1</sup>

But as comprehensive as the study sounds, its results should be viewed primarily as suggestive of future research. Despite three mailings, we were unable to achieve desirable response rates. Only a third of the contacted officials responded, a disappointing rate by any standard, but one familiar to those who study political officeholders.

### The White Press Covers the Black Community

The 1968 Kerner Commission blamed some of the nation's civil disorder on inaccurate and distorted press portrayals of blacks and black concerns, and called for new sensitivity and increased newsroom presence for blacks.<sup>2</sup>

Examining 1950-1980 coverage of blacks, Martindale said the civil rights movement, "and perhaps also the hiring of more minority reporters, made the papers' managements more aware of the concerns of black Americans." But if some researchers found "more, and more even-handed, media coverage of blacks," criticism remained that news coverage was "inadequate, unrepresentative and unfavorable."<sup>3</sup> For example, blacks thought papers did not report enough good news about blacks, and did not treat blacks fairly, particularly in crime coverage.<sup>4</sup>

Because a BEO is both the focus of news coverage and a "sounding board" for

black community reaction to press performance, the BEO--if not an expert--has a unique vantage for assessing performance of white-owned community newspapers.

#### The White Press Covers the Black Elected Official

How would a BEO describe his/her own press relations? We anticipate an answer of, "It depends," because that relationship has several dimensions. A BEO is by office a press adversary, as described in normative government-press theories.<sup>5</sup> Tradition and public imagination,<sup>6</sup> professional journalists, and the public official culture<sup>7</sup> have long maintained this adversary view.

Some relationships are more cozy,<sup>8</sup> even symbiotic,<sup>9</sup> with press serving the official's need to reach the public<sup>10</sup> "to build electoral constituencies, to test reactions to policies and to mobilize program support."<sup>11</sup> And officials, editors and publishers may be members of the community power elite.<sup>12</sup>

But these simple "obstacle/vehicle" or "combat/cozy cooperation" distinctions based on office may be less important than simple press "fairness" because BEOs represent a minority that, though it comprises about 11% of the U.S. population, holds fewer than 1.5% of elected offices.<sup>13</sup>

Chaudhary wrote, "Black elected officials are increasingly complaining about harassment and the lack of positive coverage by the media." She found stories on black leaders, though longer than white leader stories, presented blacks negatively and were placed in less desirable locations.<sup>14</sup>

The BEO's relations with the press are far more complex than "watchdog-lapdog" cliches permit, encompassing official and personal dimensions, "press as 'adversary'" and "press as 'vehicle'" dimensions, and the majority-racial minority dimension. That relationship is not exclusively a reporter-source one (whether "watchdog-adversary" or symbiotic) nor exclusively a black-white one.

#### The Black Elected Official Uses the News Media

But whatever his/her views of press performance and fairness, the BEO is a decision maker. What value are these "imperfect" news media in decision making?

First, any elected official might use the news media as sources of some kinds of job-related information: e.g., to track public sentiment and learn "which way the wind is blowing" in the statehouse or, locally, in city hall.

After all, Dunn called the press an "instant poll" serving "a substantial linkage function," providing news of public thinking<sup>15</sup> and enabling Congressmen "to order their priorities."<sup>16</sup> Others call news media "opinion-to-policy linkage mechanisms"<sup>17</sup> tying electorate to elected,<sup>18</sup> and transmitting "the systemic agenda of community concerns."<sup>19</sup>

Others see news media as a forum facilitating community consensus.<sup>20</sup> Conflicts between groups and public opinion are thus spotlighted and brought to the attention of the public's elected officials.<sup>21</sup>

Dunn also described state officials tracking their own agencies in the press,<sup>22</sup> and Matthews<sup>23</sup> and Key<sup>24</sup> described a similar Washington phenomenon.

Yet legislators often call news media relatively unimportant sources of job-decision information because of specialized information needs created by complex issues.<sup>25</sup> Used more for decision information<sup>26</sup> are purposive but readily available "insider" sources (lobbyists,<sup>27</sup> expert colleagues<sup>28</sup> or committee members).<sup>29</sup> Mayors, city administrators<sup>30</sup> and Washington officials also credit media coverage with only a minimal impact on decisions they make.<sup>31</sup> Alabama legislators recently rated news media behind these insiders for both job-decision information and for non-decision needs--tracking capital or statehouse activities, local constituent concerns and public opinion.<sup>32</sup>

Why a minor role for news media? Antipathy toward the press may preclude use of troublesome adversaries. Ironically, the adversary posture may diminish media ability to link public and public servant.

Cohen said policy makers take "more out of the press than any one of them readily admits to, or may even be aware of."<sup>33</sup> For example, Florida legislators

were "more willing to admit a neutral, surveillance role for the press than a guidance role that usurps prerogatives."<sup>34</sup> Concern with image or style<sup>35</sup> precludes acknowledging that an important policy decision was affected by the mere news media.<sup>36</sup>

### Research Questions

This study explored the relationship between black leadership and the news media by examining several research questions:

1. How do BEOs evaluate white press coverage of the black community?
2. According to BEOs, how might the white press improve coverage of the black community?
3. How do BEOs evaluate their treatment by the white press?
4. How do BEOs evaluate their relationship with news media personnel?
5. How do BEOs use the news media for job-related needs?
6. Because the sample design involves three levels of public office, what between-level differences are there on these variables (Q.1-5, above)?

### Method

The Samples. All 387 black state legislators were mailed questionnaires,<sup>37</sup> but "undeliverables" pared the population to 343. Only 33% (113) were completed. The sample underrepresents some Deep South states but does not differ significantly from the population in regional representativeness.<sup>38</sup>

All 289 black mayors were mailed questionnaires, but only 247 were deliverable. Only 32% (80) were returned. The sample underrepresents several individual states, but regional representativeness does not differ significantly from the population.<sup>39</sup>

All 1,427 black school board members were mailed questionnaires, but only 1,292 questionnaires were deliverable. Only 359 responded, and respondents from Southern states were badly--and significantly--underrepresented.<sup>40</sup>

The Measures. Five-point Likert-type items (responses ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") were used to measure respondent views on

performance of "the major white-owned newspaper" in the community. Use of news media for job-relevant information was self-reported, utilizing statements<sup>41</sup> asking: "To what extent do each of the following provide (one of four information types)?" Each statement was followed by a list of specific sources (i.e., newspapers, television, and radio). Measurement was via a five-interval scale (values ranged from "Not at All Useful" to "Very Useful").

These self-reported ratings are of course only an indirect measure of BEOs' actual consulting or searching—or even passive processing—of the media for job-relevant information. Moreover, the information types do not exhaust the range of professional information needs. Three of them tap a range of important needs suggested in the literature: keeping tabs on constituents' concerns, discovering "which way the wind is blowing" in the capital or at city hall, and making a decision. For comparison, the fourth information type dealt with media usefulness "for personal matters."

#### Findings and Discussion

Table One's demographic profile of the three samples reveals few differences. Only party identification indicated any major contrast, with Democrats the party for nearly all the legislators but only three-fourths of the mayors.

When community size is examined, however, a marked contrast is evident ( $\chi^2=118.73$ , 4 d.f.,  $p<.0001$ ). Black mayors tended to be from smaller communities (fewer than 25,000 residents),<sup>42</sup> while legislators lived in communities with more than 100,000 residents. School board members were distributed more evenly across the three size categories.

These size contrasts may indicate critical differences in "the press" a respondent is evaluating; "the press" to a small-town mayor is quite different from "the press" in a large city or metro area.

Table Two reports percentages agreeing (combined "agree" and "strongly

agree") and mean agreement with items on coverage of the black community. For between-sample comparisons, oneway analysis of variance was used, with a post hoc least significant between-means differences test if the overall F was significant at the  $p=.05$  level.

Fewer than a fourth of the BEOs agreed that the local white-owned press "does a good job in providing news coverage of the black community," though mayors were slightly more "pro-press." Seven of ten agreed that the local paper "fails to report a number of stories of interest and importance to blacks," with legislator agreement significantly greater.

Seventy percent agreed that the white press misunderstands "issues that involve blacks," and few believe the newspaper publisher cares about those issues. The latter is a telling point, given that only one BEO in four believed white readers would complain if the paper increased its black coverage. By dismissing the argument that black news alienates white readers, BEOs defuse the argument that neglect of black news is "what the (white) public wants"; responsibility for neglect must rest in the publisher's office.

Black legislators were significantly less likely to agree that white reader complaints would follow enhanced attention to black news. This may represent an even more focused indictment of the newspaper, again because it indicates legislator disbelief that news coverage neglect of the black community can be explained away as "purely an economic decision" in large metropolitan communities.

While between-sample differences are intriguing, we need to emphasize the unanimity of response on most items for BEOs in elected offices, from different size communities, etc.

Table Two shows that most BEOs also perceive discrimination, if not neglect, in press coverage of blacks across an array of areas, including public office, crime, business and industry, education, and the professions. Complaints of discriminatory treatment in crime are not new; the extent to which

BEOs believe blacks even in high-status professions such as law and medicine--and elected office--are treated unfairly adds an important qualifier to those complaints.

What would improve black news coverage? Table Three presents BEO views on how to improve coverage of the black community. A full 91% agreed that increased contact with black community leaders would help. A majority endorsed use of black readership surveys, increased contact with black elected officials, and the Kerner Commission's greater "newsroom presence" for blacks. Legislators were significantly greater advocates of hiring more black reporters and editors, and of the paper's assigning a black reporter to cover his/her office.

Again, the significant difference may be attributable to the community size located by each sample; legislators are from larger communities where the sheer size of the black community and the volume and complexity of black news demand more black journalists. The suggestion is not that black journalists be employed only because being black helps the paper fulfill a coverage obligation to the black community; instead, increased black presence cannot help but make the news organization more sensitive, if not sympathetic, to black issues.

Respondents were unwilling to agree that a separate black news page or a regularly contributed column by the BEO would improve coverage. Legislators were slightly more likely to endorse the column idea, and significantly more likely than school board members to suggest that the paper contact them more often for stories. Many, many newspapers do, of course, publish columns from congressmen on a regular basis.

The BEO's generally unfavorable view of his/her own relationship with the press is explored in Table Four. Only 40% of BEOs--but only 33% of legislators--think the paper is "interested in disseminating favorable news" about the BEO's office, while 80% described the press as more interested in reporting

controversy.

But despite that negative view, more agreed that the community press had helped them than agreed the press had hindered them. The faint praise notwithstanding, few BEOs credited the press with "a good job in providing news coverage" of their office. School board members, however, were significantly more positive in their response. Perhaps if they received the media "attention" of a mayor or legislator, they would be less positive.

Table Four also presents BEOs' essentially negative views on the fairness of press coverage. Fewer than a third agreed they received "fair and accurate commentary" from opinion columnists, a complaint no doubt voiced by many elected officials. And school board members, who seldom draw editorial ire, were again slightly more upbeat in their assessment.

But when asked to compare their treatment with that afforded white public figures, BEOs unloaded on the local press. Three-fourths agreed whites had more "influence" with the press, with legislators agreeing most.

Two-thirds agreed that coverage of black and white officials was different and unequal, with white officials receiving "more favorable news coverage." Legislator agreement was significantly greater than for mayors or school board members. The perceived discrimination was clearly racial; only slightly more than a third of BEOs believed belonging to the publisher's political party would enhance one's news coverage.

Why were legislators more critical on these items? Black mayors are "big frogs in small ponds," and most school board members have--or seek--relatively little direct press contact or coverage. A black legislator trying to present his/her programs or initiatives in a large community's newspaper, on the other hand, must vie for limited newsspace with that community's mayor, councilmen, other legislators and myriad other government or political news figures. Most of these competitors for newsspace are, of course, white.

School board members' more positive view of the press--or their relative lack of contact with members of the press!--was evidenced in their description of the reporter they work with. Board members were significantly less likely than mayors to brand the reporter an adversary, but significantly more likely than mayor or legislator to call the reporter a "supporter." There were no significant between-sample differences on views of reporter fairness, accuracy and freedom from bias.

Given the animosity toward the press and press coverage of the black community, how useful could the news media be for BEOs seeking to monitor constituent opinion or make a decision affecting those constituents?

Table Five provides between-sample differences on mean usefulness scores, and percentages calling sources "Useful" or "Very Useful" for three news media sources (newspaper, television and radio), and three types of job information. For contrast purposes, we also elicited responses on usefulness of these sources in the BEO's personal life.

Table Five also examines within-sample between-media differences. That is, it examines whether, for example, school board members' rating of newspapers for constituent information is significantly greater than the board members' rating for television.

Generally speaking, the three news media received their highest usefulness ratings for keeping up with "which way the wind was blowing" in city hall or the statehouse; i.e., what was happening "in local government" (as the question was worded for mayors and school board members) and "in state government" (wording for legislators). Newspapers enjoyed significantly more support than television and radio within each sample, with over half of respondents calling them "Useful" or "Very Useful" for "information about what is happening in local/state government."

As anticipated, news media received their poorest ratings for job decision information, though newspapers were rated significantly more useful than television or radio by school board members. No source, however, was judged "useful" by more than 31% of the respondents in any of the three samples.

For constituent monitoring, newspapers were again judged to be significantly more useful than television or radio by the school board sample. Though there were no significant between-media differences among legislators and mayors, those samples actually gave more positive ratings of news media than did board members.

News media also received low usefulness ratings for personal information needs, with the sample of legislators giving significantly lower ratings than mayors or board members for all three media sources. The highest usefulness rating among legislators for personal information was for radio, and even then only one in five saw radio as useful. None of the three samples indicated between-media differences for personal information.

### Conclusions

Despite the fact that the response rate for all three samples was low, we feel some tentative conclusions might be offered.

It could be said that BEOs literally "have no use" for the white press. They find press coverage of the black community to be insensitive (to black issues and concerns of blacks), incomplete (in failing to cover black news) and inappropriate (whether involved in crime or in education or the professions, blacks are not treated fairly).

Not surprisingly then, BEOs don't find news media particularly useful for finding out what is going on in the black community, whether for tracking constituent concerns or for making a decision affecting those constituents. Only for tracking what is going on around them at city hall or at the statehouse do they provide even a lukewarm evaluation of news media usefulness. Predict-

ably, newspapers were rated the best (most useful) of a bad lot.

What is if not surprising then at least provocative to us is the sentiment among so many BEOs that white readers would not complain if the newspaper improved its black news coverage. "Giving the (majority white) public what it wants" is often offered as an off-the-record justification for not improving minority coverage. For BEOs, that argument is not justified; instead they cite publishers who simply aren't concerned with black issues.

BEOs endorsed an array of recommendations for improving black community coverage, revealing remarkable patience simply by completing these questionnaire items; many were 20-year-old Kerner recommendations that still haven't come to pass.

The intensity--and in most cases unanimity--of BEO responses to most items represents an important statement on how deeply these experts on coverage of the black community feel about the inadequacy of that coverage.

But there were some differences among BEOs that are intriguing, in terms of the context they provide for views on community coverage, and for what they tell us about how newspapers treat BEOs.

Black legislators, for example, come from larger metropolitan communities and larger constituencies than the mayors or most school board members in this study. Legislators face more of a struggle than small-town mayors when it comes to having their voices heard in the news media. The struggle is over newshole space or airtime.

All the combatants--white or black--in that struggle are striving to be heard. And all often run head-on into the "adversary press" buzzsaw. But according to black legislators, some combatants are more equal than others. Not surprisingly, black legislators are highly critical in describing their own relations with the news media.

The small-town black mayors in this study don't face as much of a struggle to be heard. In fact, there are few in a small town who can compete for news coverage on an equal plane with the mayor, except perhaps at election time. Small-town papers are traditionally less aggressive than their large-city counterparts.

Black school board members are also comparatively unscarred by too much contact with the news media. The stakes in their work are comparatively lower, and less newsworthy, and because of the aura of "serving the common good" that accompanies working to improve public education, they are typically spared contact with journalists working in an aggressive or adversary mode.

Much of this discussion, of course, is interpretative. We recognize fully the limitations of our low-response, mail survey data-gathering procedure. We have tried nonetheless to examine the relationship of black elected leaders to the press as a nexus, where adversary dimensions meet racial dimensions; where BEOs are objects of coverage, experts on quality of coverage, and potential users of coverage for decision making.

We're not suggesting necessarily that newspapers should serve as "data gathering" organs for BEOs--or any elected official--to make sure constituent concerns are heard. Nor are we suggesting that news organizations drop their traditional watchdog position in favor of a "kid gloves" approach. All levels of government need that scrutiny.

But to the extent that news media neglect meaningful, "useful" coverage of any segment of the electorate, they may be unable to perform a potentially critical linking function that could serve both the public and the elected official.

And to the extent that the news media are unable to shake the persistent and perhaps unwarranted perception that they are primarily and unremittingly the adversaries of the elected representatives of the people--and that race is a key

factor in how adversarial the relationship will be--they may be unable to shake the distrust they have earned among black leaders and citizens.

## Notes

1. A partial or preliminary report on only the state legislator sample was presented at the AEJMC concention in Portland last year.
2. Kerner Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York: Bantam, 1968).
3. Carolyn Martindale, "Coverage of Black Americans in Five Newspapers Since 1950," Journalism Quarterly, 62:321-328, 436 (Summer 1985), particularly p. 328.
4. Alexis S. Tan, "Evaluation of Newspapers and Television by Blacks and Mexican-Americans," Journalism Quarterly, 55:673-681 (Winter 1978).
5. See, generally: Theodore Peterson, Jay W. Jensen and William L. Rivers, The Mass Media and Modern Society (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965); Bernard Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Douglass Cater, The Fourth Branch of Government (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).
6. "Public Finds News Media More Fair Than Accurate," Los Angeles Times, Oct. 11, 1981, p. 1.
7. L. John Martin, "Government and the News Media," in Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders (eds.) Handbook of Political Communication (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981), pp. 445-465.
8. For example, see: Walter Gieber and Walter Johnson, "The City Hall 'Beat'," Journalism Quarterly, 38:289-297 (1961); Cohen (1963), op. cit.; Delmer Dunn, Public Officials and the Press (Reading, MA: Addison-Westley, 1969a), and "Symbiosis: Congress and the Press," in Robert O. Blanchard (ed.) Congress and the News Media (New York: Hastings House, 1974) p. 243; Susan H. Miller, "Reporters and Congressmen: Living in Symbiosis," Journalism Monographs, No. 53 (January 1978); and Fred Fico, "How Lawmakers Use Reporters: Differences in Specialization and Goals," Journalism Quarterly, 61:793-800, 821 (1984a); and "The Ultimate Spokesman Revisited: Media Visibility of State Lawmakers," Journalism

Quarterly, 61:383-391 (1984b).

9. Dunn (1974), op. cit., and Miller, op. cit. were apparently the first to use the term to describe newsmakers' and reporters' mutually beneficial interaction.

10. Much of the work in this area has dealt with legislators' "representational style." See: William A. Taggart and Robert F. Durant, "Home Style of a U.S. Senator: A Longitudinal Analysis," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 10:489-504 (1985); Malcolm E. Jewell, "Legislator-Constituency Relations and the Representative Process," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 8:303-337 (1983); Malcolm E. Jewell, Representation in State Legislatures (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982); Heinz Eulau and Paul D. Karps, "The Puzzle of Representation: Specifying Components of Responsiveness," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 2:223-254 (1977); and Richard F. Fenno, Jr., Home Style: House Members in Their Districts (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1978).

11. Fico (1984a), op. cit.

12. See: Robert K. Thorp, "Media Gatekeepers and Community Power Structure," paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism, Syracuse, 1965; Lewis Donohew, "Publishers and Their 'Influence' Groups," Journalism Quarterly, 42:112-113 (Spring 1965); and G.A. Donohue, C.N. Olien and P.J. Tichenor, "Leader and Editor Views of Role of Press in Community Development," Journalism Quarterly, 62:367-372 (Summer 1985).

13. Black Elected Officials: A National Roster 1986, Fifteenth Edition (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political Studies, 1986).

14. Anju G. Chaudhary, "Press Portrayal of Black Officials," Journalism Quarterly, 57:636-641 (Winter 1980). There are exceptions: some authors argue that press sensitization to charges of discrimination in coverage led to "gentle" treatment of Jesse Jackson's 1984 run for presidential nomination. Jannette Lake Dates and Oscar H. Gandy Jr., "How Ideological Constraints Affected Cov-

erage of the Jesse Jackson Campaign," Journalism Quarterly, 62:595-600, 625 (Autumn 1985).

15. Delmer D. Dunn, "Differences Among Public Officials in Their Reliance on the Press for Information," Social Sciences Quarterly, 49:829-839 (1969b).

16. Dunn (1974), op. cit.

17. Cliff Zukin, "Mass Communication and Public Opinion," in Nimmo and Sanders, op. cit.

18. James C. Strouse, The Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Public Policy Analysis: Linkage Explorations (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1975), p. 20; or Robert S. Erickson, Norman R. Luttbeg and Kent L. Tedin, American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content and Impact 2nd Edition (New York: John Wiley, 1980), pp. 12-15; or Roger W. Cobb and Charles D. Elder, "Communication and Public Policy," in Nimmo and Sanders, op. cit., pp. 391-416.

19. Cobb and Elder, op. cit., p. 392. See also Roger W. Cobb and Charles Elder, Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda-Building (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1972); David Weaver and Swanzey Nimley Elliott, "Who Sets the Agenda for the Media? A Study of Local Agenda-Building," Journalism Quarterly, 62:87-94 (1985); Dan Caspi and Yehiel Limour, "How the Yom Kippur War Affected Israeli Legislators' Media Exposure," Journalism Quarterly, 55:474-480, 493 (1978); and Michael B. Hesse, "A Coorientation Study of Wisconsin State Senators and Their Constituents," Journalism Quarterly, 53:626-633, 660 (1976). Other writers, however, give less emphasis to news media as means of tapping public opinion, and emphasize instead polling, personal contact with constituents and community leaders, mail and phone calls. See: Jewell (1982), op. cit. and Fenno (1978), op. cit.

20. Phillip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue and Clarice N. Olien, Community Conflict and the Press (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980).

21. Clarice N. Olien, George A. Donohue and Phillip J. Tichenor, "The Community

- Editor's Power and the Reporting of Conflict," Journalism Quarterly, 47:472-478 (1968).
22. Dunn (1969b), op. cit.
  23. Donald R. Matthews, "'Covering' the Senate," in Blanchard (1974), op. cit.
  24. V.O. Key, Public Opinion and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 405.
  25. Paul Sabatier and David Whiteman, "Legislative Decision-Making and Substantive Policy Information: Models of Information Flow," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 10:395-421 (1985); and Peter Wissel, Robert O'Connor and Michael King, "The Hunting of the Legislative Snark: Information Searches and Reforms in U.S. State Legislatures," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 1:251-267 (1976).
  26. Robert B. Bradley, "Motivations in Legislative Information Use," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 5:393-406 (1980); Sabatier and Whiteman, op. cit.; Robert Zwier, "The Search for Information: Specialists and Nonspecialists in the U.S. House of Representatives," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 4:31-42 (1979); and Michael E. Abrams and James E. Hawkins, "Legislators' Perception of Newspaper Functions," Newspaper Research Journal, 5:51-57 (Summer 1984).
  27. Jewell, (1982) op. cit.; Harmon Zeigler, "The Effects of Lobbying: A Comparative Assessment," Western Political Quarterly, 22:122-140 (1968); and Lester Milbrath, The Washington Lobbyists (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963).
  28. John Kingdon, Congressmen's Voting Decisions Second Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1981); Bradley, op. cit.; Zwier, op. cit.; Donald Matthews and James Stinson, Yeas and Nays: Normal Decision-Making in the U.S. House of Representatives (New York: Wiley, 1975); and H. Owen Porter, "Legislative Experts and Outsiders: The Two Step Flow of Communication," Journal of Politics, 36:703-730 (1974).
  29. See Zwier, op. cit.; and Richard F. Fenno, Jr., Congressmen in Committees

(Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973).

30. Ellen W. Kanervo, "Community Newspapers and Town Administrators: Policy Agenda Building in Small Towns." Paper presented to the AEJMC Southeast Regional Colloquium, March 1988, Tuscaloosa, Ala.
31. Edmund B. Lambeth, "Perceived Influence of the Press on Energy Policy Making," Journalism Quarterly, 55:11-18 (1978).
32. Daniel Riffe, "Comparison of Media and Other Sources of Information for Alabama Legislators," Journalism Quarterly, 65:46-53 (1988).
33. Cohen, op. cit.
34. Abrams and Hawkins, op. cit.
35. Jewell (1982), op. cit., describes two "styles" of representation typical of the image most legislators attempt to project to constituents: the "trustee" who follows his own judgment, knowledge and understanding; and the "delegate" who, in effect, "takes instructions from constituents" (p. 95).
36. Unwillingness to acknowledge influence is ironic, given the overwhelmingly positive ratings lawmakers typically give to those who seek deliberately to influence policy: lobbyists and special interests groups.
37. Data, and addresses, for each state's black elected officials were obtained from the then-current Black Elected Officials: A National Roster 1986, Fifteenth Edition (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political Studies, 1986). All subsequent references to population characteristics refer to BEO names in the roster.
38. When sample proportions representing the South, the East, the Midwest and the West are compared to population or roster representation of these regions, chi-square is 2.21 with 3 d.f. ( $p > .05$ ).
39. When sample proportions representing the South, the East, the Midwest and the West are compared to population or roster representation of these regions, chi-square is 3.14 with 3 d.f. ( $p > .05$ ).

40. When sample proportions representing the South, the East, the Midwest and the West are compared to population or roster representation of these regions, chi-square is 18.59 with 3 d.f. ( $p < .001$ ). A full 53% of roster school board members were from Southern states, but only 41% of identifiable sample questionnaires came from Southern states. The most underrepresented Southern states were Mississippi (only 12 of 93 responded) and Louisiana (only 31 of 123).

41. The instrument was pilot tested with public officials in Illinois, as detailed in Daniel Riffe, Elijah Akhahenda and Kristen Dollase, "'Local' Public Officials, the News Media, and Other Channels: Is Channel Perception Unidimensional?" Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, 1984.

42. The several black mayors of America's largest cities (500,000-plus) did not return questionnaires, though representatives of Chicago Mayor Harold Washington sent a note after Washington's death.

TABLE ONE

## Characteristics of Sampled Black Officials at Three Levels of Government

|                                | School<br>Board | Mayors | State<br>Legislators |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------|----------------------|
| Mean age in years              | 51.8            | 52.3   | 48.7                 |
| Modal age in years             | 45              | 43     | 37                   |
| Mean education in years        | 22.6            | 21.9   | 20.9                 |
| Modal education in years       | 16              | 18     | 19                   |
| Political party identification | %               | %      | %                    |
| Democrat                       | 83              | 74     | 99                   |
| Republican                     | 5               | 11     | 0                    |
| Independent                    | 12              | 14     | 1                    |
| TOTAL                          | 100             | 100    | 100                  |
| (n=)                           | (359)           | (80)   | (113)                |
| Community size <sup>a</sup>    | %               | %      | %                    |
| Fewer than 25,000              | 40              | 74     | 4                    |
| 25,000 to 100,000              | 28              | 17     | 25                   |
| More than 100,000              | 32              | 9      | 71                   |
| TOTAL                          | 100             | 100    | 100                  |
| (n=)                           | (359)           | (78)   | (113)                |

<sup>a</sup> Chi-square, for the frequencies represented by these percentages is 118.73, with 4 d.f. ( $p < .0001$ ).

TABLE TWO

Percentage<sup>1</sup> and Mean Agreement of Black Officials at Three Levels of Government on Local Press Performance in Covering Blacks and the Black Community (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree)

|                                                                                                                          | TOTAL | School Board mean         | Mayors mean               | State Legislators mean      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                                                                                                          | (%)   | (%)                       | (%)                       | (%)                         |
| My community newspaper does a good job in providing news coverage of the black community.                                | (24)  | 2.50<br>(25)              | 2.71<br>(31)              | 2.34<br>(19)                |
| My community newspaper fails to report a number of stories of interest and importance to blacks.                         | (70)  | 3.73 <sup>a</sup><br>(68) | 3.77 <sup>b</sup><br>(63) | 4.11 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(81) |
| My community newspaper does not understand some issues which involve blacks in the community.                            | (70)  | 3.71<br>(68)              | 3.78<br>(67)              | 3.94<br>(78)                |
| The publisher of my community newspaper is concerned about issues that are important to black readers.                   | (22)  | 2.54<br>(21)              | 2.69<br>(26)              | 2.53<br>(21)                |
| White readers would complain to the publisher if my community paper began to cover news of interest to blacks.           | (27)  | 3.05 <sup>a</sup><br>(31) | 2.97 <sup>b</sup><br>(24) | 2.62 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(15) |
| My community newspaper provides fair and balanced coverage without regard to race to news concerning blacks involved in: |       |                           |                           |                             |
| Public office                                                                                                            | (29)  | 2.68<br>(32)              | 2.62<br>(27)              | 2.45<br>(23)                |
| Crime                                                                                                                    | (26)  | 2.45<br>(27)              | 2.71<br>(28)              | 2.32<br>(24)                |
| Business and Industry                                                                                                    | (30)  | 2.76<br>(31)              | 2.94<br>(33)              | 2.61<br>(26)                |
| Education                                                                                                                | (35)  | 2.77<br>(35)              | 2.89<br>(38)              | 2.71<br>(32)                |
| Professions such as Law and Medicine                                                                                     | (28)  | 2.71<br>(29)              | 2.79<br>(30)              | 2.48<br>(23)                |
| (Approximate n=)                                                                                                         |       | (359)                     | (80)                      | (113)                       |

<sup>1</sup> Percentages reflect combined "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses.

<sup>a,b</sup> Common superscripts indicate a significant ( $p=.05$ ) difference between means sharing the superscript. Oneway anova was used, and if the overall F probability was less than .05, a least significant differences post hoc test was used.

TABLE THREE

Percentage<sup>1</sup> and Mean Agreement of Black Officials at Three Levels of Government  
on How Local Press Can Improve Coverage of Blacks and the Black Community  
(1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree)

|                                                                                                                                                          | TOTAL | School<br>Board<br>mean     | Mayors<br>mean              | State<br>Legislators<br>mean |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                          | (%)   | (%)                         | (%)                         | (%)                          |
| My community newspaper would get a better understanding of matters of interest to black readers if it:                                                   |       |                             |                             |                              |
| published a readership survey/<br>questionnaire specifically to<br>assess blacks' views of news<br>coverage.                                             | (73)  | 3.97<br>(74)                | 3.95<br>(73)                | 3.94<br>(71)                 |
| contacted black elected officials on<br>a regular basis.                                                                                                 | (87)  | 4.24<br>(87)                | 4.15<br>(81)                | 4.39<br>(92)                 |
| contacted black community leaders in<br>education, religion, business and<br>other fields on a regular basis.                                            | (91)  | 4.36<br>(91)                | 4.24<br>(87)                | 4.44<br>(92)                 |
| hired more black news reporters.                                                                                                                         | (78)  | 4.18 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(78) | 3.91 <sup>a,c</sup><br>(61) | 4.44 <sup>b,c</sup><br>(89)  |
| hired a black editor.                                                                                                                                    | (60)  | 3.81 <sup>a</sup><br>(57)   | 3.72 <sup>b</sup><br>(54)   | 4.13 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(73)  |
| created a specific page for news<br>about blacks.                                                                                                        | (27)  | 2.88<br>(27)                | 3.12<br>(31)                | 2.69<br>(22)                 |
| published stories from interviews<br>with me more often.                                                                                                 | (42)  | 3.18 <sup>a</sup><br>(39)   | 3.41<br>(47)                | 3.44 <sup>a</sup><br>(45)    |
| allowed me to write a regular column.                                                                                                                    | (24)  | 2.94<br>(23)                | 2.89<br>(18)                | 3.15<br>(30)                 |
| My community newspaper could do a better<br>job of reporting news about the public<br>office I hold by assigning a black<br>reporter to cover my office. | (49)  | 3.43 <sup>a</sup><br>(44)   | 3.66<br>(52)                | 3.73 <sup>a</sup><br>(58)    |
| (Approximate n=)                                                                                                                                         |       | (359)                       | (80)                        | (113)                        |

<sup>1</sup> Percentages reflect combined "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses.

a,b Common superscripts indicate a significant ( $p=.05$ ) difference between means sharing the superscript. Oneway anova was used, and if the overall F probability was less than .05, a least significant differences post hoc test was used.

TABLE FOUR

Percentage<sup>1</sup> and Mean Agreement of Black Officials at Three Levels of Government  
on Adversary, Objective or Cooperative Relationship with Local Press  
(1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree)

|                                                                                                                              | TOTAL | School<br>Board<br>mean   | Mayors<br>mean            | State<br>Legislators<br>mean |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                              | (%)   | (%)                       | (%)                       | (%)                          |
| My community newspaper is interested in reporting favorable news about the public office I hold.                             | (41)  | 2.97<br>(41)              | 3.08<br>(44)              | 2.78<br>(33)                 |
| My community newspaper is interested in reporting controversy involving the public office I hold.                            | (82)  | 4.13<br>(83)              | 4.03<br>(75)              | 4.19<br>(86)                 |
| At times, my community newspaper has <u>hindered</u> me in reaching my objectives as a public official.                      | (38)  | 3.04<br>(35)              | 3.17<br>(42)              | 3.30<br>(45)                 |
| At times, my community newspaper has <u>helped</u> me in reaching my objectives as a public official.                        | (45)  | 3.19<br>(44)              | 3.09<br>(44)              | 3.18<br>(47)                 |
| My community newspaper does a good job in providing news coverage of the public office I hold.                               | (39)  | 2.98 <sup>a</sup><br>(42) | 2.69<br>(35)              | 2.69 <sup>a</sup><br>(30)    |
| Local opinion columnists who write for my community newspaper present fair and accurate commentary about my public office.   | (32)  | 2.86<br>(34)              | 2.70<br>(27)              | 2.72<br>(29)                 |
| Some white elected officials have more influence with my community newspaper than I do.                                      | (73)  | 3.98<br>(72)              | 3.83<br>(67)              | 4.16<br>(80)                 |
| There is a difference in the way my community newspaper covers news about white elected and black elected officials.         | (66)  | 3.70 <sup>a</sup><br>(63) | 3.67 <sup>b</sup><br>(64) | 4.02 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(76)  |
| In general, white elected officials receive more favorable news coverage in my community newspapers than do black officials. | (67)  | 3.71 <sup>a</sup><br>(66) | 3.60 <sup>b</sup><br>(63) | 3.98 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(75)  |

(CONTINUED)

TABLE FOUR  
(continued)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                           | TOTAL | School<br>Board<br>mean     | Mayors<br>mean            | State<br>Legislators<br>mean |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                           | (%)   | (%)                         | (%)                       | (%)                          |
| An elected official who is a member of<br>the same political party as the<br>publisher of my community newspaper<br>has a better chance of getting news<br>coverage than someone of a different<br>party. | (38)  | 3.27<br>(38)                | 3.25<br>(35)              | 3.33<br>(39)                 |
| The reporter I deal with at my community<br>newspaper can be described as:                                                                                                                                |       |                             |                           |                              |
| An adversary                                                                                                                                                                                              | (31)  | 2.94 <sup>a</sup><br>(27)   | 3.41 <sup>a</sup><br>(45) | 3.09<br>(32)                 |
| A supporter                                                                                                                                                                                               | (35)  | 3.21 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(41) | 2.83 <sup>a</sup><br>(25) | 2.94 <sup>b</sup><br>(23)    |
| A friend                                                                                                                                                                                                  | (23)  | 2.90<br>(24)                | 2.84<br>(27)              | 2.91<br>(19)                 |
| An opponent                                                                                                                                                                                               | (21)  | 2.81<br>(19)                | 2.98<br>(29)              | 2.95<br>(23)                 |
| Fair                                                                                                                                                                                                      | (60)  | 3.46<br>(60)                | 3.46<br>(61)              | 3.40<br>(59)                 |
| Accurate                                                                                                                                                                                                  | (46)  | 3.15<br>(44)                | 3.22<br>(49)              | 3.29<br>(50)                 |
| Biased                                                                                                                                                                                                    | (42)  | 3.20<br>(41)                | 3.40<br>(44)              | 3.15<br>(41)                 |
| (Approximate n=)                                                                                                                                                                                          |       | (359)                       | (80)                      | (113)                        |

<sup>1</sup> Percentages reflect combined "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses.

a,b Common superscripts indicate a significant ( $p=.05$ ) difference between means sharing the superscript. Oneway anova was used, and if the overall F probability was less than .05, a least significant differences post hoc test was used.

TABLE FIVE

Percentage<sup>1</sup> and Mean Usefulness for Black Officials at Three Levels of Government  
on Usefulness of News Media as Information Sources  
(1=Not at All Useful, 5=Very Useful)

|                                                                                                   | TOTAL | School<br>Board<br>mean | Mayors<br>mean | State<br>Legislators<br>mean |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
|                                                                                                   | (%)   | (%)                     | (%)            | (%)                          |
| Usefulness for information on what<br>issues are on the mind of your<br>constituents.             |       |                         |                |                              |
| newspapers                                                                                        | (34)  | 2.93<br>(30)            | 3.21<br>(43)   | 3.04<br>(42)                 |
| television                                                                                        | (31)  | 2.81<br>(30)            | 3.07<br>(37)   | 2.92<br>(30)                 |
| radio                                                                                             | (33)  | 2.88<br>(32)            | 2.97<br>(35)   | 3.02<br>(37)                 |
| Usefulness for information about what<br>is happening in local/state<br>government.               |       |                         |                |                              |
| newspapers                                                                                        | (52)  | 3.47<br>(55)            | 3.35<br>(49)   | 3.32<br>(46)                 |
| television                                                                                        | (43)  | 3.17<br>(47)            | 2.99<br>(37)   | 3.08<br>(36)                 |
| radio                                                                                             | (46)  | 3.11<br>(49)            | 3.21<br>(44)   | 3.11<br>(38)                 |
| Usefulness for information for making<br>decisions in your job as legislator/<br>public official. |       |                         |                |                              |
| newspapers                                                                                        | (30)  | 2.84<br>(29)            | 2.89<br>(31)   | 2.83<br>(30)                 |
| television                                                                                        | (24)  | 2.66<br>(24)            | 2.74<br>(28)   | 2.67<br>(21)                 |
| radio                                                                                             | (26)  | 2.69<br>(26)            | 2.80<br>(28)   | 2.71<br>(24)                 |

<sup>1</sup> Percentages reflect collapsed "Useful" and "Very Useful" category.

a,b Common superscripts indicate a significant ( $p=.05$ ) difference BETWEEN sample means sharing the superscript. Oneway anova was used, and if the overall F probability was less than .05, a least significant differences post hoc test was used.

VERTICAL lines join means within each sample that are significantly different at the  $p<.05$  level, by the correlated t-test.

(CONTINUED)

TABLE FIVE  
(Continued)

|                                                             | TOTAL | School<br>Board<br>mean   | Mayors<br>mean            | State<br>Legislators<br>mean |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
|                                                             | (%)   | (%)                       | (%)                       | (%)                          |
| Usefulness for information useful in<br>your personal life. |       |                           |                           |                              |
| newspapers                                                  | (32)  | 2.86 <sup>a</sup><br>(36) | 2.90 <sup>b</sup><br>(39) | 2.33 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(15)  |
| television                                                  | (31)  | 2.84 <sup>a</sup><br>(33) | 2.96 <sup>b</sup><br>(40) | 2.40 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(18)  |
| radio                                                       | (30)  | 2.77 <sup>a</sup><br>(33) | 2.81 <sup>b</sup><br>(34) | 2.38 <sup>a,b</sup><br>(20)  |

<sup>1</sup> Percentages reflect collapsed "Useful" and "Very Useful" category.

a,b Common superscripts indicate a significant ( $p=.05$ ) difference BETWEEN sample means sharing the superscript. Oneway anova was used, and if the overall F probability was less than .05, a least significant differences post hoc test was used.

VERTICAL lines join means within each sample that are significantly different at the  $p<.05$  level, by the correlated t-test.